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making a fetish of compromise. And in studying the defects of French politics, he may find himself studying popular government and the relation that exists between forms of government and the character and history of a people.

NATURALISM IN ENGLISH POETRY. By Stopford A. Brooke, M.A., LL.D.
New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

The predominating impression one receives from these essays and lectures is that they are the work of one who narrowly missed being a great critic. Persuasively introducing his readers to the poets whose qualities and significance he discusses and tracing the transition from formalism to naturalism with rare clearness and tact, the author fulfills almost to perfection many of the functions of a good teacher of English literature. Occasionally he shows something like originality of interpretation or almost attains that simple profundity of elucidation which is the supreme virtue of the critic; yet in the difficult work of revealing the vital connection between literary genius in its various perplexing forms and recognized human needs or human destiny, he falls always a little short.

The failure to develop a definite literary creed, even to approach a standpoint from which one can see literary excellences as undoubted values (to do more than approach it is perhaps too much to ask of any critic), this failure is disappointing. Dr. Brooke's *humanity* is, to be sure, always as much in evidence as his artistic sensibility. His criticism is full of wise observations and exquisitely precise appreciations; it is never merely technical, and it is never crassly moralistic or philistine in temper. Frequently it seems about to bridge the gulf that divides the lover of art for art's sake from the dweller in the real world who obstinately wants to know what poetry is good for—a person whose point of view always has to be reckoned with in the long run.

Poetry, says the author, escaped "from London into the world, from artificial into natural thinking on the subject of mankind. And along with this outlook to the future of man in which fresh life was hoped for, there was also, and concordant with it, a reversion to the past when life was natural, when convention scarcely existed, when the artificial was all but unknown, and men spoke, wrote, acted and thought out of the impulsive passion of the moment." But should men think, act, and write out of the impulsive passion of the moment? One gathers from the whole of Dr. Brooke's discussion that *sometimes*, if not always, it is well to do so! This however is but the illogical compromise of the average mind bewildered by the power of poetry and by its lack of definite significance in life. Again writes Dr. Brooke: "It is a terrible business for poetry when it is wholly employed on man or wholly employed on nature. In either case, the poetry becomes thin, feeble, unimaginative, incapable of giving impulse or bringing comfort." The remark falls just short of profundity. Truly, one can scarcely resist the suggestion that poetry should

aspire to give a complete, not an abstract or mutilated account of experience. It seems that only one further step may be necessary in order to achieve a standpoint from which one might be able both to estimate the value of poetry and to explain its power. But no such step is taken. It is but fair to ask of a critic writing from a frankly human standpoint that he shall make some attempt to relate literature to life, that he shall not simply take for granted all the various and more or less conflicting values claimed for poetry. The very ordinary assumption, that literary genius (the genius, for example, of Byron) is undoubtedly in some way a good thing, if not a joy for ever, while more or less moralistic or pragmatic criteria are always to be admitted in discussing preferences, and that an evaluation of the *kudos* belonging to an author because of his "place in literature" may always be properly substituted for a discussion of his real value, must leave one unsatisfied.

To have a catholic taste is doubtless eminently desirable; it is a pity, for instance, not to be able to enjoy both Shelley and Wordsworth. But catholicity should be a philosophy and not merely a willingness to accept whatever fine thing is offered. It is necessary, therefore, to compare Wordsworth and Shelley. How do we fare in such a comparison under the guidance of Dr. Brooke?

"Yes, it is a good thing," writes the critic, "to be led by Shelley to enjoy our own dreams, to touch the remote and delicate pleasures of beauty, to feel the far off joys of infinite dreams of good, of fine regrets; to enter into the subtle spiritual world of nature where every dewdrop has its own indweller, and every cloud its own spirit which builds and unbuilds it again. And men are getting very old when they are no longer grateful to him for expressing this silken-woven world of phantasy and love within us. Nevertheless, it is better to be brought by Wordsworth to see the beautiful in the common world; to be filled with tenderness for the men and women with whom we live; to be taught to conquer regrets; to take things with a noble patience; to get the good out of the battle; to secure our victory and peace; and when we are led into Nature, to be led into her actual world and yet to feel behind it and behind ourselves, so that Nature and we are knit together in harmony, there is one thinking Spirit, one Wisdom, one Power and one Love."

It would be stupid not to recognize the value of this fine passage; yet Shelley and Wordsworth are not so easily to be reconciled. One who has made Wordsworth his father confessor must always feel that to surrender his soul to Shelley can be nothing but a kind of dissipation. To an adorer of Shelley, the Wordsworthian way of taking life can never be wholly acceptable. The *moods* of these two poets are incompatible. To be sure, if we are not to take either mood into the stream of experience, there will be no difficulty whatever: we may intoxicate ourselves with Shelley for the sake of artistic excitement, just as (to adopt a homely and antiquated simile) one drinks a cocktail. But if this Epicurean view of poetry be adopted, what becomes of the preference for Wordsworth on moral grounds?

The fact is that we cannot escape from the philosophic implications of either poet. If we do not in some measure surrender to the poet, we cannot really care for him, and if we do, we are under the psychological necessity of carrying into our lives some effects of the poet's mood. If there is any subtle falsity in this mood—falsity inherent in the very quality of his feeling or expression—then we are sure to encounter the baneful effects of it, unless we are guarded by an intelligent, inclusive criticism. It is of no use to tell us that Shelley is in his main drift simply a great preacher of liberty or a lover of spiritual beauty; for what we shall get from Shelley, if we get anything that is Shelleyan at all, is not his main drift, but the intimate quality of his thought and emotion, his way of taking life. There is no escape from this dilemma except through sheer hedonism on the one hand or through a criticism confined to barren questions of technique or literary "taste" on the other.

Thus, while Stopford Brooke has written good criticism, he has not written great criticism; for a criticism which, while dealing with human values, does not really seek for the larger reconciling ideas, and which always in a pinch leans toward a theological standard (the chapter on Byron's *Cain* is virtually a sermon, though an uncommonly good one) cannot be called great.

DOMESDAY BOOK. By Edgar Lee Masters. New York: The Macmillan Company.

This latest and most portentous work of Mr. Masters may be roughly compared in idea to Browning's *The Ring and The Book*. Like the latter poem, Mr. Masters' versified narrative tells the story of a life from many different points of view, and seems to say finally that concerning the true inwardness of human experience, God only knows. It is true that while Browning obtained his material from an old book, Mr. Masters appears to have derived his largely from a conscientious reading of the newspapers; and that he seems to say, "God only knows," with a somewhat different accent. These divergencies do not, however, vitiate the comparison. Newspapers may be quite as good artistic material as a book, however old and worm-eaten, and in these days every one may be considered free to say "God only knows," in whatever accent he pleases.

To be more precise, Mr. Masters tells the story of a girl's life as it gradually comes to light through the investigations of an extraordinary coroner's jury, a jury presided over by a philosopher who is not content till he has exposed every phase of the dead woman's experience from childhood onwards and traced the "riffles" her life made in the lives of other people to the point where the waves of influence become microscopic and imperceptible. Misunderstandings that ruin young lives, illicit love affairs, spasms of goodness, the love of freedom, the value of courage in the pursuit of one's own destiny—all these are treated *in extenso*, with much reportorial straightforwardness and some philosophy: the report of a post-mortem examination is given in all